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ILLINOIS HISTORICAL SURVEY

Farming the Cutover

The Settlement of Northern Wisconsin

James I. Clark

The State Historical Society of Wisconsin

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FARMING THE CUTOVER

The Settlement of Northern Wisconsin

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JAMES I. CLARK

STUMP-DOTTED the land might be, but it was fertile and would yield rich rewards to those with industry and perseverance. John Welch proved that, and he was only one of hundreds, according to the Wisconsin Central Railroad, which had a lot of cutover land to sell.

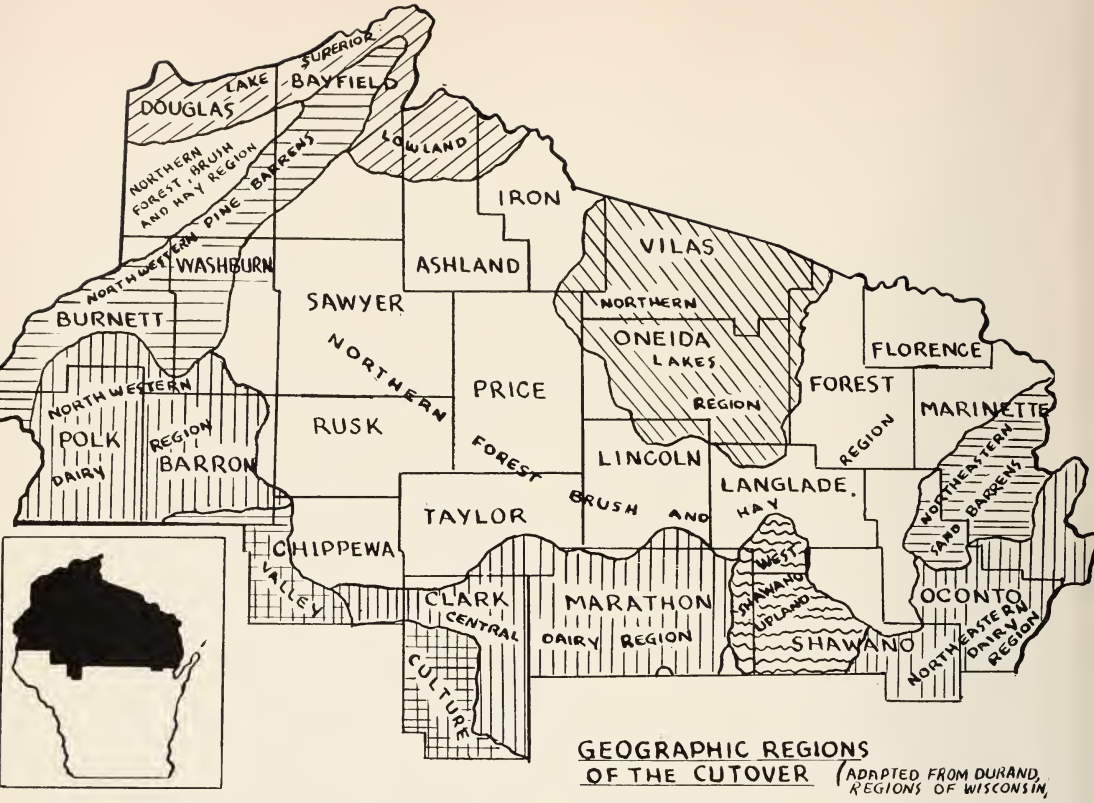
Mr. Welch was the kind of pioneer Northern Wisconsin needed. Out of work in 1873, he took on 80 acres of Wisconsin Central land. In the fall, two and a half cleared acres yielded over 700 dollar-a-bushel potatoes. That plus odd jobs between planting and harvesting netted Mr. Welch enough to pay off his $400 farm and put $300 in the bank. And he was no farmer. "The time he spends at farming is only his play time," said the railroad.

For those who knew agriculture, it was even better. "Every Man Willing to Work Can Get a Farm," stated the railroad, and offered abundant testimony to back that and other statements.

"I have noticed that many who had gone to Texas, Kansas, and the Dakotas and Minnesota have come back and taken up their homes permanently in this county," wrote the Rev. J. D. Nelsenius of Ashland in the 1890s. "I went myself to Colorado . . . and returned firm in the belief that Northern Wisconsin is far better for farming than Colorado" he added.

Jesse Moore, living near Spencer in 1898, wrote: "This is the best place for settlers that I have found out of *nine* states." Joseph Arnold told how he

> came from Germany ten years ago and settled upon timber land in Ashland County. I had not money enough to buy a ticket from Morse to Bayfield where the land office was at that time, so walked both ways, about 65 miles each way. . . . I now have two forties, mostly all cleared, and another forty acres . . . of which I have about 15 acres cleared, and mostly all plowed.



In the 1890's John H. Wallace of Phillips warned that good cheap lands were going fast. "I would say to all poor men or men with moderate meanes [*sic*] that wish to secure themselves a home to come to this part of the country and come soon or you will not have mutch [*sic*] choice of land."[1]

Beginning of Land Promotion

As logging came to an end, there was a question of what to do with the land. For those who owned it—lumber companies, railroads, speculators—logged-off land was burdensome. Many local governments, with roads, schools and other services to maintain, and some with debts to care for, kept tax rates high. Some land was assessed at 50% or more of market value. In some areas every forty acre plot was assessed at $1,200 regardless of its value. In one northern county a single forty was taxed at $5.51 in 1904 and at $44.50 four years later, reflecting the community's desire for increased improvements as well as increased stumpage values. In 1892 the village of Eagle River, with hardly 1,000 people, raised more than $50,000 in taxes. In the eighties, the 800 people of Ashland County carried a debt of $200,000. Lincoln County, with slightly more people, had one of $110,000.

There were of course areas in which railroads and lumbermen had better control of local governments. In some places land was assessed at much less than half its real value. And some land was completely overlooked when tax rolls were made out each year.[2]

Yet as far as most large owners were concerned, the general picture showed too high taxation. The same

was true of land that still had standing timber. High rates led in some cases to rapid, uneconomic logging that cleared out the woods faster than they might otherwise have been. Lumbermen contended that it was unprofitable to replant trees and pay high taxes while waiting for them to grow. Some invested in Southern and Western timber, and when Wisconsin trees were gone, left the state and allowed the land to revert to town and county governments. Delinquent tax lists grew longer every year.

As the logging era passed, it was natural that many people should think that those hundreds of thousands of unused acres should be made into farms. Local governments were interested, as increased population would further distribute the tax load. There were also those who sincerely believed that the land should finally be owned and worked by farmers. That had been the pattern of America's development in many places. First came the exploiters—the fur traders and the lumbermen. Then came the farmers, the 80 or 40 acre farmers, who put the land to its real use: the production of food. Furthermore, the free, independent landowner was the bulwark of liberty, the backbone of the country. There was no reason why that pattern of development shouldn't be followed in Northern Wisconsin. The approaching end of free western lands also gave impetus to the promotion of the Cutover. It was the "new frontier."

The Promoters

Railroads, speculators, newspapers, lumber companies, voluntary colonization societies, state boards of immigration, even the College of Agriculture encouraged the settlement of northern lands. The Wisconsin Central, for example, had over 800,000 acres, and hired agents to work eastern and European cities, offering land at around $5 per acre. The line sponsored lectures in Chicago, and showed slides depicting farm scenes in Taylor, Price and Ashland Counties. By 1895 the company had sold nearly 300,000 acres.

Speculators like James L. "Stumpland" Gates acquired hundreds of thousands of timbered and cutover acres. His agents fanned out over the country to earn a dollar for every acre they sold. Heronymous Zech began a Polish colony at Crivitz, in Marinette County. He built stores, houses, schools and roads and attracted many Milwaukee residents to the area. By December 1896 he had disposed of around 3,000 acres.

Editors of country weeklies sang the praises of the Cutover. One of the best known and most energetic was Ed L. Peet, whose Grantsburg *Journal of Burnett County* carried maps, articles and speeches on the area. Peet described the progress of settlements and wrote stories about great potential demand for agricultural products.

Local papers carefully noted stories

on blizzards, droughts and grasshopper plagues in the West, pointing out the absence of those calamities in Northern Wisconsin. Such disasters would bring the pioneers back, the editors thought, and lead them to settle the Cutover.

State Boards of Immigration had checkered existences. One was set up in 1879 to publicize Wisconsin lands in the east and abroad, through leaflets, pamphlets and agents. Northern Wisconsinites weren't satisfied that the Board produced enough farmers for that region, however, and it was abolished in 1887. It bounded back a few years later at the height of late 19th century promotion and lasted until 1901, when it was once again ended. A new Board was established in 1907, and had a somewhat longer life than many of its predecessors.

The College of Agriculture got into the promotion of Northern Wisconsin when the 1895 legislature authorized the publication of a book describing the area. Prepared under the direction of Dean William A. Henry, *Northern Wisconsin, A Handbook for the Homeseeker* covered every aspect of farming the Cutover. There were chapters on climate, temperature, rainfall, soil types, field crops, swine, sheep and cattle raising, dairying, and many other items. The book was the product of careful, on-the-spot research. Although encouraging agriculture in the area, the *Handbook* carefully pointed out the difficulties of farming there. It noted the hardships of land clearing and the pitfalls of poor soil and possible lack of ambition on the part of settlers.

Fifty thousand copies of the book were soon gone. By 1900 copies were selling for one dollar each. Sixty thousand English, German and Norwegian pamphlets used illustrations from Henry's work.[3]

The Land

The land these various agencies were promoting has been described by one writer as

> in appearance most forbidding. It showed gaunt, ghostly looking dead pines still erect, giant trunks burned off at the base and in falling arrested by other dead but standing timber, half-buried logs overgrown and hidden by underbrush or by groves of saplings; in short, timber living and dead inextricably intermingled and nearly all worthless.[4]

Some parts of the Cutover were better for farming than others. There was the region later called the "Lake Superior Lowland," made up of the extreme northern parts of Douglas, Bayfield, and Ashland Counties. A frost-free 130-140 days would allow the growing of some corn, but mostly the red clay soil was good for oats and hay. Near the lake, strawberries and currants would flourish.

The "Northern Lakes" region, including almost all of Vilas and Oneida, and good shares of Price, Iron, Lincoln, Langlade and Forest Counties, was mostly sand and sandy loam soil. Good for garden crops and hay and oats, and excellent for potatoes, a short growing season and cool summer nights made corn raising in the region difficult. The area was interwoven with muskeg–swamps where the muck was overgrown with brush and leaves. Here cranberries

"Timber living and dead, inextricably intermingled . . ."

grew well. The region was well supplied with lakes, and in later years would support a large and prosperous resort business.

One of the largest regions was that called "Northern Forest, Brush and Hay," which had, as did most of the regions, plenty of second growth poplar, birch and aspen, and a lot of stumps to be grubbed out of fields and pastures. Clayey loam was the main soil type, with patches of sand, sandy loam and loamy clay. Here hay and potatoes would do well. Here also farmers would have to haul sometimes 15 to 20 wagonloads of rock from fields before they could do much farming. The region was dotted with swamps and marshes containing spruce, hemlock and tamarack, some of which would be drained and put to agricultural use. In this region the nights were normally too cool, the growing season too short, for extensive crops of corn.

The forest and brush region was divided into two parts by the "Northwest Pine Barrens," which had a counterpart in the northeastern part of the state. The Barrens, a narrow strip 15 to 20 miles wide and 130 miles long dotted with yellow grasses and in some parts with sand dunes. was not the best agricultural land. Oats, hay, rye and potatoes would grow there, and corn would do fairly well in a soil that rapidly absorbed moisture, but also held heat. Wire grasses of the region would later supply the fiber mat and carpet industry. In the southern two thirds of the region could be found many marshes and lakes and some cranberry land. The Northeastern Barrens had about the same soil type. At the same time, rivers such as the Peshtigo and the Marinette would be a source for waterpower.

There were three regions that would support a fairly strong dairy

Beginning of a farm in the woods.

industry. Those were in the northwest, the northeast, and the central part of the state. Hay, corn, oats, barley and potatoes would also do well in those parts. In the central region by 1927 there would be over 250,000 dairy cattle, and the area would be known for its excellent cheddar cheese.

One other region, later called the "West Shawano Upland," where was located a terminal moraine of the Wisconsin glacier, would also support some dairying. This region was characterized by rocky, wooded drumlins and bumpy, pitching, wooded moraines. There were many giant granite boulders to be weeded from the land. The lower levels were ill-drained and swampy. Maple, birch and hemlock trees grew in abundance, and the region would produce a certain amount of maple sugar.[5]

The Settlers

Yet even the best of Cutover land presented hardships to farmers, and tried the spirit and endurance of even the hardiest pioneers. "There is no royal road to farming in northern Wisconsin," Dean Henry wrote. Clearing a farm is a job

> requiring much hard labor extending over a period of years; the amount of material in the shape of trees, living and dead, together with the brush, stumps and undergrowth, is often sufficient to make one's heart grow faint when he thinks that the entire removal of this great mass is necessary before the ideal field can be secured. . . . No one should make the venture of home building in the new north before he has carefully counted the cost in the beginning and looked clear through to the end.[6]

But if a man chose his land care-

A pioneer family.

fully, was ambitious, unafraid of hard manual labor, he could make it. "All settlers, no matter how poor, are sure of the bare necessities of life if they come among us," declared Henry, "provided they are temperate, willing to do hard work and for a time forego all approach to luxuries."

Many newcomers found it too hard, and quit the land. Others were driven out by lack of funds, and were unable to obtain sufficient credit to keep going.

Early in the promotional game it was discovered that immigrants from foreign countries made the best Cut-over pioneers. Yankees were not attracted to felling trees, grubbing out stumps and carting away rocks. Promoters and colonization groups welcomed Finns, Germans, Swedes, Norwegians and others — immigrants often with little or no money, looking for a start in a new country and willing to work long hours for little immediate return to make it.

To some of them, Northern Wisconsin resembled the homeland. The Blue Grass Land Company of Minneapolis knew that when it advertised among Finns in 1902, pointing out that it had set aside 25,000 acres in Vilas County for a colony of that nationality. The land, claimed the company, was "just as good as those famed 'blue grass' lands of Kentucky." Finns would find the area's numerous lakes pleasant and valuable. "Springs without number, streams and lakes rich with fish, and numerous small woods make the scenery the most varied and lovely in the Northwest," read the ad. The land could be had for from five to ten dollars an acre, and there would be free railroad transportation for buyers. A church and school would be erected as soon as there were

enough people there. Forty free acres were offered to the person suggesting the best name for the colony, one at the same time easy to pronounce in English.

A colony of Finns came, and in May 1902 it was announced that three people had submitted the prize-winning name: Toivola—"Vale of Hope." Apparently life wasn't all the company said it would be, for the colony didn't last long.

Finnish people settled other parts of Vilas County. By the end of 1909 there were ten families around Eagle River, and by 1912 over two hundred immigrants had settled in or around Phelps.

A group of Finns farmed the Brule region, some as early as 1888. Oscar Estrom was one of the first pioneers there. He and his mother walked forty miles from Superior to their new home. It was a rugged, and in many ways adventurous life.

> With characteristic Finnish humor [Estrom] calmly told the following story as one of his favorities: "One day I was hauling hay for a neighbor with an ox, when I came face to face with several timber wolves. I kept a tight grip on my pitchfork, the ox stared sullenly, and when the wolves finally slunk away, my cap settled down on my head as my hair returned to normal from an upright position.[7]

Bernard Bay, a German immigrant, came to Glidden, Ashland County in 1883. Instead of buying land, Bay homesteaded 160 acres. His land contained virgin pine, as well as hemlock and birch. The first year was spent clearing land and burning the huge logs that were felled and rolled out of the way by manpower alone. The single family cow was pastured in the natural meadows and hay was cut from the marshes and stored for winter feed.

The first full winter he was there, Bernard Bay worked in a logging camp and in the spring planted a garden, cleared more land and bought a yoke of oxen. Oats, potatoes and vegetables were put in the cleared land and between the stumps on cut-over acres. After 1890 additional income came from hauling logs to charcoal kilns at Glidden, which supplied the iron industry of the area. Later a market developed for bark at a tannery in Medford.

Each year a little more land was cleared, a little more equipment and stock added, and the long years of hard work gradually paid off.[8] But it was pioneering of the toughest sort —the kind which had long since passed in other parts of Wisconsin and the Middlewest.

Settlement to 1910

People came to settle the Cutover, although not as many as promoters of the area would have liked. Between 1880 and 1900 there was a gain of about 20,000 new farms, including a little more than one million acres. The southern fringe—Shawano, Marathon, Clark, Chippewa, Polk and Barron Counties — made the largest gains. Cultivated land was up from 18% to 24% of the total area in those counties, while the rest of the Cutover got perhaps 10% more land in farms.

Around 1900 promoters enthusiastically predicted a great land boom. Those with land and those rushing to invest in it expected big things. A Northern Colonization Company

"There is no royal road to farming in Northern Wisconsin."

bought several thousand acres in Marinette County and advertised for farmers. An investor from La Crosse got 20,000 acres and a Milwaukeean 15,000 acres of stump lands to promote. Several Chicago firms made large investments in the area. The Laird Norton Company of Winona, Minnesota, a lumber concern with land to sell, was beseiged with mail from druggists, school superintendents, insurance salesmen, postmasters who wanted to be agents. Even the warden of the State Penitentiary at Waupun wanted in on the deal.

A group of Wisconsin and Minnesota lumbermen organized the American Immigration Company in 1905. This concern held over 430,000 acres in Northern Wisconsin, enough to pay $55,000 in taxes during its first six years of operation. The Stark Potato Company invested in Oneida County land and by 1912 had huge stump pullers at work clearing the 18,000 acres.

A flow of settlers to Canada after the turn of the century worried those with investments in Northern Wisconsin. Promoters played up the difficulties of settlement further north and discouraged Canadian land agents from operating in Wisconsin. Various local and regional groups formed to combat emigration and to boost Cutover land sales. The North Wisconsin Farmers' Association sent a "Grasslands Car" around Wisconsin, and into Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota and Nebraska. The car had been converted from a railroad passenger car, and was decorated with maps, pictures, and samples of farm produce. On top it carried a large electric sign: "Farm Products From the Best Region on Earth for the Homeseeker." Up to the fall of 1906 railroads hauled the car free and soon after that tours were ended.

Looking for a way to avoid the job of clearing land, some farmers went heavily into raising livestock.

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One method of stump removal.

Sheep was the rage for awhile, as it was thought the animals were well-suited to the area. H. L. Russell, who became Dean of the College of Agriculture in 1907, warned that sheep were subject to parasitic infections and wouldn't thrive on brushy lands. Time proved him right.

Angora goats got a lot of attention for a time. This, supporters claimed, was just the animal for the Cutover. Angoras liked to eat brush, and could do the work of many men in clearing land and would produce mohair and meat besides. One could not lose on these goats, until it was found that Angoras needed good grass like any other goats, and kids couldn't stand cold damp weather.

The College of Agriculture did much for Northern Wisconsin farmers. The College experimented with seeds and fertilizers especially adapted to Cutover soils. It established branch stations at Spooner, Ashland Junction and Marshfield. Demonstration farms were set up at Superior and Conrath. Counties were given help in organizing county agent programs and by 1915 nineteen of them had men working directly with farmers. The College also experimented with stump-pulling devices and explosives, seeking easier ways to clear the cut-over land.[9]

Yet in spite of such aid and extensive promotion Northern Wisconsin was not exactly overflowing with people. Between 1890 and 1900 the state's population increased from 1.6 to 2.3 million. That of the 24 northern counties went up from 331,600 to 477,200. Not all that increase represented agricultural gain. In 1910 the city of Ashland had 11,500 people, Chippewa Falls 8,800, Superior 47,400 and Rhinelander 5,600.

Farm acreage had increased in the whole area, the southern counties still proving to be the most attractive. Clark County had a total area of nearly 500,000 acres in 1910, and 411,000 of it was in farms. Marathon had 994,500 acres, with 532,800

being farmed. Ashland County, on the other hand, was farming 72,000 out of a total of 692,000 acres that year, and Taylor County, 136,000 out of 634,000 acres. However, not all of that farm land was cleared and under cultivation. Ashland County, for example, reported only 24,000 improved acres in 1910, while Marathon had 184,000.

Land values had gone up, although in some counties average per acre prices for farms weren't high. In Ashland County land was worth $8.48 an acre in 1910. In Taylor County it was $10.88 and in Burnett, $5.10. Clark and Marathon land was worth more: $19.57 and $14.29 an acre respectively. Those prices might be compared with Walworth County, where land went for an average of $48.26 an acre, and Winnebago County, where it sold for $42.57 in 1910.[10]

The Forestry Movement

While promoters boosted Cutover settlement and painted the agricultural future of Northern Wisconsin in rosy colors, there was a current of opinion running in another direction. A minority group in the state felt that much of the Cutover was good only for reforestation.

By the end of the 19th century some interest in forest conservation had been aroused in Wisconsin, as well as in other states. Coupled with that, there were stirrings of what would later become a great "industry," and one that depended on trees. That was the resort business. In the 1880s, railroads were promoting vacations in Northern Wisconsin with pamphlets such as "Our Summer," and "Summer Saunterings in Northern Wisconsin," complete with maps and pictures of lovely lake scenes and long strings of trout. Professor James J. Blaisdell of Beloit College spoke in 1893 for forest culture, and pointed out how wonderful the northern lakes region was for resorts. By 1897 it was claimed that sportsmen left $20,000 annually in the north woods. Summer vacationers spent many more thousands there.

The State Horticultural Society promoted reforestation at many of its annual meetings. A Wisconsin Forestry Association was formed in 1893 under Society prodding, following similar movements in other states. An American Forestry Congress had been established, and Ohio, Michigan and Minnesota had associations designed to promote conservation and reforestation. These groups also worked for more adequate fire prevention and protection, for the conflagrations that swept the woods not only destroyed timber, but left the soil unfit for trees, farm crops, or anything else.

By 1897 enough Wisconsin legislative support for forestry was raised for a commission to be appointed. The group was to draw up plans for conserving, protecting and utilizing forests of the state.

The commission reported the next year, having concluded that "The establishment of a system of state forests is a necessity, not only for the protection of the climate and waterflow of the state, but for the purpose of providing a sufficient supply of raw material to the various lumber and wood industries of the state." Filibert Roth, a forester who had been a special agent for the com-

A resort at Sayner, in 1894.

mission, also wrote a report. Of the 130 billion board feet of pine timber originally in Wisconsin, only about 17 billion were left, plus several billion feet of hemlock and hardwoods. Eight of the original 17 million forested acres were "'cut-over' land, largely burned over and waste brush lands, and one-half of it as nearly desert as it can become in the climate of Wisconsin." It was recognized that the good clay and loam soils might well produce farm crops, but at least 40% and probably more of the area was non-agricultural. Probably 10 million acres would remain unproductive of anything save trees and brush for some time to come. If any tax income was to result from such land, it would have to be from timber resources.

Bills carrying out the commission's recommendations did not become laws until 1903. Then a State Forestry Commission (later the Board of Forestry) was established. That marked the beginning of state forest conservation work. It also marked the beginning of several years' controversy between those wanting reforestation and those promoting agricultural settlement in Northern Wisconsin counties.

Edward M. Griffith

The Commission began work by reserving 40,000 acres to start a state forest system. It also selected Edward M. Griffith to be forest superintendent (later State Forester). Griffith had worked with Clifford Pinchot, forester for Theodore Roosevelt.

Wisconsin's forester planned large. He had in mind a forest reserve that would eventually cover two million acres. Although the state didn't acquire land as rapidly as Griffith would have liked, he did get increased appropriations for purchases and forestry work each year.

A constitutional amendment to

permit the state to appropriate money to develop water power and forests got started in 1907. The voters approved it three years later. Laws were passed allowing the state to acquire tax delinquent lands and other legislation set up fire inspection regulations, and authorized town boards to buy land for forest plots.

The Forestry Board set up a system of fire patrols and equipment and cut lanes in the timber. It began an educational program to reduce the annual fire loss in timber and soil. Nurseries were established at Trout Lake and Tomahawk to provide seedlings for reforestation. Griffith gave forestry lectures at the University. He advocated community forests and the development of farm wood lots. He got a woodlot tax exemption law in 1907 (which few farmers took advantage of), and encouraged a study of forest taxation aimed at helping timber owners profitably hold onto forests by reducing or postponing taxes until the trees were cut. Probably too, Griffith had some influence in getting the federal Forest Products Laboratory located at Madison in 1909.

By 1915 about 180,000 acres had been purchased. Added to what the state had in school lands—income from which had to be used for educational purposes—and other reserves that made a total forest reserve of about 500,000 acres.[11]

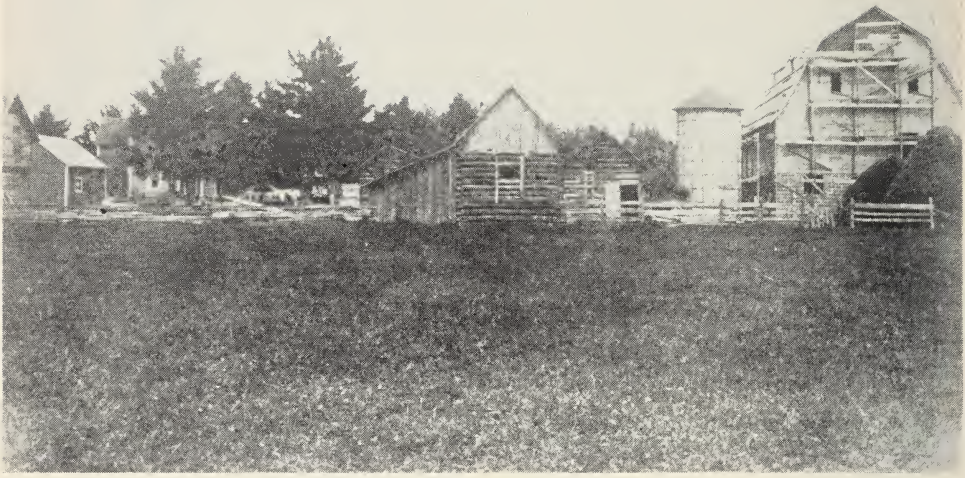
Opposition to Forestry

The location of the state forester's two million acre reserve caused considerable speculation and worry among some Northern Wisconsinites. Although Griffith said many times that no land suitable for farming would be used, his words were received with some skepticism by agricultural promoters.

A total of 62,000 acres had been purchased by the state in Vilas, Oneida and Iron Counties. A College of Agriculture soil survey of Vilas and Oneida identified only 22% of the area as containing loamy sand—possibly agricultural soil. The report didn't favor farming much of the land, for it feared that many settlers would be isolated and town and county costs for schools and roads would be high.

This was a tip-off on the reserve's location. Parts of Price, Forest and Florence Counties were to be included. Still, residents of the area doubted that Griffith could find two million acres of non-agricultural soil in that section of the state. Furthermore, they were prepared to argue their case. In what became a full-scale battle over Wisconsin forestry, the anti-reforestation group got encouragement from outside the state.

Reforestation and conservation sentiment had been growing on a national scale, thanks to Theodore Roosevelt, Gifford Pinchot and others. The federal government and some states had become active in reserving forest tracts, providing fire protection and educating people on tree conservation. Enthusiasts often coupled reforestation with stream and flood control, emphasizing the role of trees in preventing erosion and, lessening flood danger. Then Lt. Col. Hiram M. Chittenden of the Army Corps of Engineers dropped a bombshell, in the form of a paper read before the American Society of Engineers in 1908.



A Northern Wisconsin dairy farm.

Chittenden was convinced that forest conservationists overdrew their case on flood control. He also feared that foresters wanted to take river, harbor and flood work away from the army, by saying much of that could be done by controlling forests. He attacked the idea that forest cover in an area had much to do with preventing floods, and in doing so perhaps overdrew *his* case.

The colonel agreed that the humus bed under forests was a good storehouse for water, as forestry men maintained. But during heavy rains such land became saturated, and therefore didn't do much to lessen the rise of streams and prevent floods. He also claimed that the evenly distributed snow in forests melted rapidly with warm weather. That might contribute to abnormal stream load. In unforested areas the snow drifted into natural reservoirs, melted slowly and fed streams gradually. Some foresters claimed that forest cover aided precipitation in an area. Chittenden said that there was no proven connection between forests and the amount of rain or snow an area received. He also didn't think that forests had as much to do with preventing stream erosion as some enthusiasts claimed they had.

Chittenden went along with reforestation, however, but he wanted it confined to places where industries could readily obtain and use the trees. He wanted that, not flood control, to be the guiding factor.

Influenced by this blast, a University of Wisconsin engineer, Daniel W. Mead, made a study of Wisconsin streams. He claimed that many factors of temperature, climate and precipitation caused floods, or the drying up of streams. These things were not the result simply of cutting

down the trees. He asserted that there had been neither decrease nor increase of flow in Wisconsin rivers over the past 35 or 40 years, except that caused by annual or seasonal variation in precipitation or temperature.[12]

Regardless of such arguments, many people were convinced that reforestation and conservation of remaining forests was necessary. The rapid cutting of timber in Wisconsin and other lake states had been wasteful. Steps should be taken to insure a continuous supply of wood for industries, and provide spots of scenic beauty and recreation for the general public. At the same time, regardless of how much forests had to do with stream flow, they did hold a lot of soil in place. They also stored water which trickled down and maintained the water table of an area.

Yet there were people in Northern Wisconsin who had other ideas about forestry. They had an economic stake in selling land to settlers who would farm it. The work of Mead and Chittenden gave them additional arguments against the state reforestation program. Griffith's plans for a large forest reserve ran head-on into opposition from agricultural promoters.

Anti-Forestry Agitation

Ed L. Peet, in his Grantsburg *Journal of Burnett County* had objected to reforestation as early as 1903. Ten years later two Rhinelander papers, the *News* and the *New North,* led the attack on Griffith and his ideas. Newspapers of other northern counties joined in and the debate pro and con forestry and agriculture became quite general.

In February 1912 the *New North* prefaced an anti-forestry letter with: "It is gratifying to know that the people of Rhinelander are even at this late day awakening to the need of developing agricultural resources of Oneida County." The letter-writer claimed the soil was rich and excellent for farming. He pointed out that state-owned forest reserves reduced local tax income. Counties should elect representatives to the legislature who would insist on selling the land to settlers.

The *News* wanted outright repeal of forestry laws. It played up a Town of Newbold resolution condemning forest reserves on the grounds that they reduced school income from local taxes. The resolution, said the *News,* "is timely and deserves the attention of the state and county authorities. . . . It is hoped that the county board will also act on this question and that a decided protest will be made to the legislature." The board did protest, as did those of other counties and towns.

The *News* also occasionally ran a picture of a field of corn so tall it dwarfed a man. The picture was captioned: "When Corn grows like this picture shows it does in Oneida County, this is too good a County to be given over to Reforestration [*sic*] Schemes or for State Manipulation. We Want Northern Wisconsin Land Open for Settlers, who will make homes and farms for themselves."

Griffith denied that he was against agriculture and tried to explain forestry policy. Much northern land wouldn't support farms. Some good land might exist in the proposed re-

Local industry—hauling potatoes to a starch factory.

serve, but it was surrounded by poor land. He wanted to avoid isolated settlements that would prove costly to local governments. He agreed that more should be done to compensate towns and counties for the loss of tax money.

The 1913 legislature considered a bill to halt state land buying until the program could be investigated. Over a hundred Oneida and Vilas County residents went to Madison to lobby for the bill. When it was passed the *New North* headlined the news as a "Great Victory for Northern Counties." The paper went on to say that "surely this is a great honor to the County Board of Oneida County, also to the citizens who have done all in their power to defeat the Griffith destruction of Northern Wisconsin."

A legislative investigating committee held hearings in Eagle River, Phillips, Rhinelander and other northern cities. It covered large parts of Oneida County on foot and on horseback with timber cruisers. Committee members looked up farmers of the area and talked with them. After a lot of talking and listening the committee filed a report. It gave the forestry program a clean bill, but recommended more be done to stimulate private forestry practices by revising the method of taxing standing timber.[13]

A Supreme Court Decision

Even with such a favorable report, forestry was in for tough sledding. A case protesting state land purchases came before the Wisconsin Supreme Court in 1913. Rather than consider only a part of the question, the court decided to examine the entire forestry program. Its decision came early in 1915.

The court found that the constitutional amendment of 1910 had not been formally passed a second time by the Assembly. Neither had it been properly recorded in legislature journals. Therefore it was void and with that the entire forestry program fell apart. The court went on to say that a 1913 law allowing towns to tax state forest reserves was uncon-

A farm in Vilas County.

stitutional. Furthermore, the state couldn't obtain tax delinquent lands from counties without allowing the owners to make competitive bids. At the same time, many acres controlled by the Forestry Board actually belonged to the School Fund and must be returned. That ended Griffith's program, and he soon resigned.

The first round of the trees *vs.* furrows contest had been won by promoters of Northern Wisconsin farms. The words of the court brought great joy to the *News* and the *New North*. The decision "drives the nail to the head at once and forever, for it settles all the questions that we have been debating," said the latter. "Instead of a wilderness of stumps and brush, north of us, we are going to see hundreds of fine farms in a few years."

The *News* rejoiced that the "fight for the people of Northern Wisconsin as against the job-seeking and money spending politicians of this state" had come to a successful conclusion. "Thousands of acres of land not heretofore open for agricultural purposes will be thrown open for settlement and can be obtained cheaply from the state."

A. D. Campbell of the Wisconsin Advancement Association, one of the northland's largest promotion agencies, saw great times ahead. "This land will be taken up by the land companies and opened for settlers," he declared. "Homesteaders will have no fear for going into the country, as there is no danger that it can be taken over by the state."

Support for agricultural promotion came from the state government too. Emmanuel Phillip, the new governor, left no doubt about his stand on the question. He objected to removing land from tax rolls and putting it into forests. He recommended no further expansion of forestry, but rather favored farm settlement of the Cutover. Phillip was not against forestry as such, but he maintained that reforestation was a federal, not a state responsibility.

The Conservation Commission which had been set up in 1913 was now reorganized. It was to have

three members, one of them a forester. F. B. Moody got that job and was charged with the management of all except school lands. Forests now held or later acquired were to be used for the production of school fund money through the sale of timber or the land itself.

Tactful and energetic, Moody quietly made many friends for forestry. He worked for more fire protection and continued the nurseries that had been started under Griffith. But in 1918 he died, and with him passed a forestry program that was slowly being put back together.[14]

Meanwhile the shining ideal of a land of small, independent farmers producing food for the nation and the world came once again to the fore. Agricultural promotion and settlement of the Cutover continued, although with a somewhat different approach than before. Population in the northern counties didn't increase as rapidly as some hoped it would; but with food demands created by World War I, many foresaw a wonderful future for the area. There were also many great and unexpected problems ahead.

(See pamphlet number 13 for the later story of the Cutover).

NOTES

[1] Testimonials from *The Wisconsin Central Railroad Lands in Northern Wisconsin* (Milwaukee, 1899), 2–3, 25, 28; *The Wisconsin Central Railroad and Its Lands* (Milwaukee, 1877), 12–13; *How to Get a Home and Farm of Your Own* (Milwaukee, n.d.), 1.

[2] Robert F. Fries, *Empire in Pine* (Madison, 1951), 175–76.

[3] Arlan C. Helgeson, The Promotion of Agricultural Settlement in Northern Wisconsin, 1880–1925. Unpublished PhD. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1951, 1–71, 138–45; William A. Henry, *Northern Wisconsin, A Handbook for the Homeseeker* (Madison, 1896).

[4] Joseph Schafer, *A History of Agriculture in Wisconsin* (Madison, 1922), 144–45.

[5] Loyal Durand, Jr., The Geographic Regions of Wisconsin. Unpublished PhD. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1930, 7–125, 187–200, 393–426.

[6] Henry, *Handbook,* 162–64.

[7] John I. Kolehmainen and George W. Hill, *Haven in the Woods* (Madison, 1951), 59–60, 68.

[8] Wilfrid L. Be Beau, "A German Immigrant Farmer Pioneers in Northern Wisconsin," *Wisconsin Magazine of History,* 38:239–44 (Summer, 1955).

[9] Helgeson, Promotion of Agricultural Settlement, 113–15, 129, 146–56, 197–213, 257–74.

[10] *Thirteenth Census of the United States,* 1910.

[11] Vernon Carstensen, Farms or Forests, The Evolution of a Land Policy for Northern Wisconsin, 1850–1932. Unpublished manuscript in the possession of the author. Chapter III. *Report of the Forestry Commission of the State of Wisconsin* (Madison, 1898), Filibert Roth, *Forestry Conditions and Interests in Wisconsin* (Washington, D. C., 1898).

[12] Carstensen, Farms or Forests, Chapter IV.

[13] Rhinelander *New North,* February 15, 1912; March 20, April 17, 24, 1913; Rhinelander *News,* March 8, 22, April 26, May 3, 1912; January 3, 1913;
Carstensen, Farms or Forests, Chapter IV.

[14] Carstensen, Farms or Forests, Chapter V; *New North,* February 18, 1915; *News,* February 17, 1915; Marinette *Eagle–Star,* January 14, 1915.

(For bibliography see pamphlet number 13).

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